



what's up?

teen pregnancy

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What's it all about?

Unintended pregnancy is a national issue for women of all ages, but there are special risks and concerns with adolescent pregnancy.

Teens who become pregnant are generally not married and usually did not intend to be mothers at such a young age. Teens who bear children may be influenced by many complex problems, such as poor quality family relationships, a history of sexual or physical abuse, poverty, and a perception of poor prospects for the future. Teen mothers are more likely than other teens to report early sexual intercourse, low grades in school, and a history of delinquency.

Why does it matter?

Most teens in the U.S. don't want to be teen parents. More than 75% of teen pregnancies are unintended at conception. This makes up 25% of all unplanned pregnancies annually.

Compared to their peers who have children later, teen parents are:

- More likely to have children born at a low birth-weight, and who suffer from poor health and development.
- More likely to have low family incomes, live in poverty and receive public assistance.
- Less likely to fulfill their educational and economic goals.
- At increased risk of substance abuse, intimate partner violence, maternal depression and divorce or separation.

What are the facts?

- 1 in 23 girls ages 15–17 in Washington became pregnant in 1998. 1 in 42 gave birth.
- The teen pregnancy rate in Washington is below the national average and has been declining since 1989.
- Nationally, 1 million teenage women become pregnant each year—that's 10% of all women ages 15–19 and 19% of those who have had sexual intercourse.
- 4 in 10 young women in the U.S. become pregnant before they reach the age of 20.
- The younger women are when they first have intercourse, the more likely it is to be unwanted or involuntary.
- 20% of infants born to unmarried teens in the U.S. are fathered by men at least 5 years older than the mother.
- 1 out of 4 teenage mothers have a second child within 2 years of their first.
- Nationally, the teen birth rate dropped by about 20% between 1991 and 1999, largely because of more effective use of birth control. Still, the birth rate is higher than in the mid-1980s, when it was at its lowest point. The U.S. teen pregnancy rate is still higher than most industrialized nations.



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What can I do?

Here are some tips for parents of teens based on research, expert opinion and the experience of other families, excerpted from “10 Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy” by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:

1. Know your own values and attitudes about sex in order to be able to communicate and discuss them.
2. Build a strong relationship with your teen, nurtured from an early age and built on open communication, trust and respect.
3. Begin early and be specific when talking about sex. Invite teens to share what they know or think.
4. As parents, supervise and monitor your kids—make sure someone is available for them after school or when you can't be there.
5. Know and welcome your kids' friends and their parents.
6. Discourage early and frequent dating.
7. Establish a rule with your son or daughter against dating someone who is more than 2 years younger or older.
8. Help your teens set goals and plan for the future so that they have good reasons to avoid getting pregnant early on.
9. Encourage your child to take school seriously. Show interest in your children's work and volunteer at their school.
10. Be aware of what types of media your child is exposed to so you can help them think critically about the messages they are hearing.

What do teens want?

No single approach to teen pregnancy prevention is appropriate for all adolescents in all circumstances and in every community. It is clear, however, that there is demonstrated success when teens have:

- **A range of choices.** All adolescents need sexuality education that teaches them refusal skills and gives them up-to-date information about contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases before they are sexually active. The Institute of Medicine found that “sexuality education programs that provide information on both abstinence and contraceptive use neither encourage the onset of sexual intercourse nor increase the frequency of intercourse among adolescents...programs that provide both messages appear effective in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse and encouraging contraceptive use once sexual activity has begun, especially among younger adolescents.”
- **Strong emotional attachments.** Teens who are close to their parents are less likely to be sexually active early on.
- **Parents' advice.** 50% of teens trust their parents most for accurate information about birth control. Parents need to stress that there are consequences to sex other than pregnancy and disease. These include the impact on teens' emotional development and family life.
- **Contraception.** Two-thirds of teens use some form of contraception the first time they have sex. A sexually active teen who does not use contraception has a 90% chance of pregnancy within 1 year.

**hot
links!**

Planned Parenthood Federation of America www.plannedparenthood.org

I Wanna Know! American Social Health Association's teen site, www.iwannaknow.org

“When Children Have Children” Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Facts for Families Sheet # 31, www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/pregnant.htm

Alan Guttmacher Institute www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Facts and Stats www.teenpregnancy.org

Adolescent Health Chart Book MacKay AP, Fingerhut LA, Duran CR. United States, 2000. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics 2000. National Center for Health Statistics site—www.cdc.gov/nchs

Sexual Health for America's Adolescents D. W. Haffner, Journal of School Health, 1996, 66(4)4: 151-153.

Teen Health and the Media University of Washington Early Childhood/Teen Communications Project, www.teenhealthandthemedi.net

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